

Safeguarding Kashmiri Language and Literature: Libraries as Guardians for Preservation and Revival

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the integral role that libraries play in safeguarding Kashmiri language and literature, ensuring their continuity and relevance for future generations. Preserving endangered languages requires not only thorough documentation but also the promotion of their active use within communities. Modern technologies, including digital libraries and e-content platforms, are integral to these efforts, providing accessible repositories that support the study, revival, and global accessibility of these languages. Kashmiri, spoken by over seven million people, faces challenges of marginalisation and declining use, exacerbated by educational policies favouring dominant languages like English and Urdu. Libraries emerge as pivotal institutions in addressing these issues by digitising rare manuscripts, hosting literary events, and facilitating access to Kashmiri literature. Through the archiving of texts, oral traditions, and cultural artifacts, they safeguard humanity's linguistic and cultural heritage, ensuring its transmission to future generations. By functioning as repositories of cultural heritage, libraries not only document endangered languages but also provide platforms for their revitalisation through community engagement, educational programmes, and technological innovation. The study adopts a comprehensive literature review methodology, analysing scholarly works from databases like JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Emerald, alongside print materials, to assess how libraries contribute to safeguarding Kashmir's linguistic and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Kashmiri language, linguistic diversity, role of libraries, cultural heritage, endangered languages, language preservation

Introduction

Language serves as more than a means of communication; it is a profound marker of identity, embodying the cultural heritage, history, and values of communities. However, linguistic diversity faces a global crisis, with nearly half of the world's approximately 7,000 languages predicted to disappear within the next century, as observed by History Rise (2025). Factors such as declining speaker populations and sociopolitical pressures threaten the survival of languages, particularly those spoken by fewer than 100,000 individuals. The extinction of these languages risks the loss of unique cultural knowledge and literary traditions that they encode (UNESCO, 2023). Efforts to preserve endangered languages underscore the importance of documentation and fostering active use within communities. Modern tools, such as digital libraries and e-content platforms, play a pivotal role in these initiatives, offering accessible repositories for endangered languages and facilitating their study and revival. Libraries, as cultural and educational institutions, are at the forefront of such preservation efforts. By archiving texts, oral traditions, and cultural artifacts, libraries ensure that the linguistic and cultural legacies of humanity are transmitted to future generations.

In the context of Kashmiri, a Dardic language with over eight million speakers, the role of libraries becomes particularly significant. Despite its rich cultural and literary heritage, the Kashmiri language faces a decline due to policies favouring English and Urdu in the domains of education and administration. Libraries in Kashmir have undertaken efforts to preserve and promote Kashmiri literature through archival work, digitisation, and literary and cultural events. This research paper aims to explore the role libraries play in safeguarding Kashmiri language and literature, ensuring their continuity and relevance for future generations.

Problem Statement

Amidst the decline of linguistic diversity, libraries become important, and even essential, in preserving cultural and literary traditions of any country or region. In case of Kashmiri, libraries can enhance the accessibility of Kashmiri literature through digital tools and publications, literary events, awareness programmes, seminars and conferences, meetings and discussions among educators, professionals, scholars and students that are highly significant for promotion and preservation of

the Kashmiri language for future generations. This study, therefore, underscores the need for libraries to preserve and promote the Kashmiri language, especially in the diminishing face of language and the increasing domination of other languages in education and other domains.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study include:

1. To assess the importance of preservation of local languages with special reference to the Kashmiri language
2. To underline the importance of libraries in the promotion of Kashmiri language and literature
3. To examine the actual role of libraries in the preservation of Kashmiri language and literature for future generations

Methodology

The study employs a comprehensive literature review, drawing on scholarly databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Emerald, and others. The review systematically examines peer-reviewed articles, books, conference papers, and other academic resources that highlight the role of the libraries in supporting the preservation and promotion of the Kashmiri language.

Preservation of Endangered Languages

Recognising the intrinsic value of linguistic diversity is key to fostering a positive and proactive approach to this global challenge (Bernard, 1996). According to Jlassi and Harrathi (2025), globally thousands of languages are endangered or on the verge of extinction, a situation that threatens the loss of diverse cultural heritage. Modern learning tools, including e-content creation and digital libraries, are indispensable in conserving endangered languages. These tools offer a digital space where local languages can be documented and made accessible globally. By creating repositories of textual and multimedia materials, these tools not only preserve languages but also facilitate their revitalisation and revival. They provide a platform for communities of educators and linguists to engage in efforts to sustain linguistic diversity. This approach becomes especially critical for languages with declining numbers of speakers as digital content can immortalise linguistic nuances for future generations (Rajagukguk et al., 2022).

Role of Libraries in Promotion and Preservation of Kashmiri Language and Literature

Libraries act as vital institutions for cultural preservation, operating at the intersection of education, history, and heritage. Beyond storing books and artifacts, libraries engage in archiving languages, traditional cultural practices, and human experience as a whole. Their role extends to fostering cultural understanding by making these records accessible to scholars and the general public. Through collaborations with other cultural institutions, libraries amplify their impact, ensuring that humanity's linguistic and cultural legacies are well-preserved and transmitted to future generations. Libraries are, therefore, indispensable in maintaining the continuity of civilisations (Gundakanal & Kaddipujar, 2024). Libraries play a crucial role in promoting and conserving linguistic diversity by providing access to books and other resources in multiple languages. They serve as repositories for information that support students, scholars, teachers, and professionals, offering a wide range of language resources. Libraries also act as key preservation hubs, preserving the cultural heritage of nations, including their art, customs, culture, religion, and most importantly, their languages.

Libraries must play a significant role in the preservation of the Kashmiri language as it is a language with a civilisational past even though it is a local language of a specific region. In the Kashmir Valley, more than eight million people speak Kashmiri as their first language, with additional Kashmiri-speaking communities spread across the regions of Chenab Valley and Pakistan administered Kashmir. However, despite its rich historical and cultural heritage and geographical spread, the use of the language is declining (Teli & Nisar, 2021). Younger generations are increasingly adopting English and Urdu due to factors such as the educational policies of private schools, which often mandate English as the medium of instruction, discouraging the use of Kashmiri in academic settings (Nazki, 2025).

Historically, Kashmir has been a significant centre of culture. Nestled within Jammu and Kashmir, the Kashmiri-speaking region occupies a geopolitically delicate crossroads—flanked to the north by Afghanistan, erstwhile Soviet republics, and China; to the east by Tibet; and to the west by Pakistan—forming intricate contact zones that shape its linguistic, cultural, and geo-political landscape. Across its borders lie typologically distinct languages: Shina (a Dardic language) to the north;

Balti, Ladakhi, and other Tibeto-Burman languages to the east; Pahari and Punjabi to the west; and Dogri and other Pahari varieties to the south—each having influenced Kashmiri, particularly within transitional boundaries. From the mid-fourteenth century onwards, however, more geographically distant languages began to take precedence in literary creativity, relegating Kashmiri largely to domestic and informal spheres. During the Islamic period, especially under Sultan Zainul Abidin's rule from 1420 to 1470, Kashmiri underwent a pronounced Persianisation giving rise to a "Kashmiri Persian" literary tradition, encompassing over three hundred writers and approximately a thousand works—though patronage by the court remained limited aside from that brief epoch. Kashmiri speakers traditionally acquired multilingual abilities through religious and interpersonal channels—pilgrimages, temple and mosque discourses, and interactions with tourists—rather than formal textual learning. The language has historically been inscribed in four scripts: the ancient Sharda, rooted in Brahmi and used exclusively by Pandits (now nearly extinct); Devanagari and Roman, the latter introduced by Serampore missionaries in the early nineteenth century for biblical translation; and the Perso-Arabic script (adapted with diacritics), the last adopted by the state government, and now the dominant orthography despite critiques such as Chatterji (1935) who regarded Roman as more practical for Indian languages and Kachru (2008) who found Perso-Arabic unsatisfactory. However, Kashmiri has been largely sidelined in the formal education. Since 1953, policies have phased out Kashmiri as a medium of instruction, favouring English, Urdu, and Hindi instead (Rather & Bhat, 2014). This policy has contributed to the diminished role of the language in schools, further accelerating the decline of Kashmiri literacy and usage among the younger generations (Khawaja, 2019).

As knowledge centres, libraries in Kashmir support the preservation and promotion of its literary works, many of which have been influenced by other linguistic and cultural traditions, including Sanskrit, Persian, Urdu, and English. The Kashmiri language itself, classified as a Dardic language, has been shaped by Pali, Sanskrit, Persian, and, more recently, Urdu and English. The language has three main dialects: Kamraz (North Kashmir), Maraz (South Kashmir), and Yamraaz (Srinagar and surrounding areas). Nowadays, libraries in Kashmir are actively involved not only in storing literary works but also in preserving Kashmiri manuscripts, texts, and cultural essence. Libraries enhance the accessibility of Kashmiri literature through digital tools and publications,

organise literary events, and support public gatherings that celebrate and promote local authors. They facilitate meetings and discussions for educators and scholars, which are critical to expanding the knowledge of Kashmiri language (Rather & Bhat, 2014).

Libraries play a vital role in the preservation, promotion, and accessibility of Kashmiri literature, which is an essential part of Kashmir's cultural identity. Their contributions range from safeguarding historical texts to encouraging local literary talent and promoting cultural integration. The role played by libraries in this context can be discussed under the following heads:

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| 1. Preservation of heritage | 2. Access and availability |
| 3. Promotion and awareness | 4. Support for local authors |
| 5. Educational programmes | 6. Cultural integration |
| 7. Research support | |

1. Preservation of Heritage

Libraries are central to the preservation of Kashmiri language and culture, functioning as custodians of linguistic heritage. The decline of a language often signals cultural erosion, making its preservation crucial (Mir, 2022). Libraries are vital players in language preservation efforts. Historically, they have been repositories of knowledge, safeguarding written records from clay tablets and papyrus rolls to modern digital files. Libraries enable systematic documentation of languages, cultural practices, and historical narratives, ensuring their longevity. By providing access to these records, libraries bridge generations and foster cross-cultural understanding. Furthermore, their role in disseminating knowledge through physical and digital platforms makes them central to educational and cultural initiatives aimed at reviving endangered languages and promoting linguistic diversity [LIS (Library & Information Science) Academy, 2025].

Preservation of Manuscripts and Historical Texts

Libraries across South Asia, including those at the University of Kashmir, Central University of Kashmir, and Islamic University of Science and Technology, are adopting preservation policies and techniques to maintain their collections, thereby ensuring that Kashmir's literary heritage is preserved (Bhat et al., 2024).

Libraries in Kashmir, such as the University of Kashmir Library,

house a substantial collection of manuscripts and historical texts in Kashmiri, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and Hindi. These collections are invaluable to students and scholars interested in studying the region's cultural and literary history (Kumar, 2019). Translation plays a crucial role in preserving the language, maintaining its cultural identity, and ensuring its continued relevance in a globalised world. At present, Kashmiri is mainly spoken in the Kashmir Valley, where it functions as both a medium of cultural expression and a marker of regional identity. Translation facilitates not only the preservation of heritage but also communication across fields such as literature, media, law, and tourism. However, dialectal variations, culture specific idioms and other elements of the folklore pose challenges. Nonetheless, translation opens opportunities for cultural exchange and supports local economies by assisting businesses and tourism in the region (Lingo Chaps, 2024). The inflow of tourists from across the globe heightens the demand for Kashmiri translation services, which not only support visitors but also benefit local enterprises seeking wider outreach. Thus, the translation of Kashmiri presents both challenges and opportunities for language preservation, cultural exchange, and socio-economic development (Somyatrans, 2024).

Long-Term Documentation, Archiving and Digitisation Efforts

Language documentation is a distinct field focused on the long-term storage and preservation of primary linguistic data. Libraries serve as essential archives, ensuring the availability of these materials for future generations (Narayanan & Takhellambam, 2021).

Table 1. *Books at Allama Iqbal Library*

Language	Number of Books
Arabic	27
English	8936
Hindi	679
Kashmiri	123
Persian	2479
Sanskrit	431
Urdu	4413
Total	17088

Table 1 shows the linguistic distribution of the books at Allama Iqbal Library, University of Kashmir. Libraries in Jammu and Kashmir have undertaken digitisation projects to preserve rare and valuable texts, enhancing both their accessibility and longevity.

2. Access and Availability

Despite its rich cultural history, Kashmiri has struggled with formal recognition and marginalisation, limiting its use in administrative and educational spheres. Libraries address these limitations by making Kashmiri literature more accessible.

Libraries as Gateways to Accessibility

Libraries offer both physical and digital access to Kashmiri literature, reaching broader audiences and extending the availability of Kashmiri texts to remote and international readers. Some national libraries outside Kashmir have also facilitated online access to these works, thus widening their reach (Khan, 2020).

3. Promotion and Awareness

Libraries actively promote Kashmiri literature and culture through a variety of programmes that draw attention to the region's literary heritage and encourage local engagement.

Literary Programmes and Festivals

Libraries organise literary programmes, workshops, and festivals such as the Srinagar Literature Festival, which celebrate Kashmiri literature and its authors. These events bring visibility to Kashmiri literature, attracting local and international audiences and fostering a deeper appreciation of the language (Mir, 2022).

Support for Multicultural Engagement

By incorporating diverse multicultural materials, libraries promote intercultural understanding and enrich their collections, creating a bridge between various cultural narratives and enabling broader community engagement (Talawar et al., 2013).

4. Support for Local Authors

Libraries provide platforms for local authors offering them opportunities to engage with the community and share their work.

Encouragement for Local Talent

Libraries serve as community centres, where local authors foster connections with the community. These relationships help anchor libraries

within their cultural contexts, making them crucial for community identity and literary preservation (Abu et al., 2011). Through book launches, author talks and literary workshops, libraries demonstrate a commitment to local voices, offering a platform that supports community engagement and promotes authentic local perspectives (Wiebe, 2021).

Encouragement for Youth Participation

Youth engagement is critical to the survival of traditional languages and cultures. Many teenagers and young adults have become disconnected from their linguistic and cultural roots due to globalisation, urbanisation, and educational systems prioritising dominant languages. Libraries provide platforms by enhancing their participation in cultural activities such as traditional performances and storytelling sessions that can reignite interest in their heritage. Structured programmes that facilitate interaction between younger learners and older, more fluent speakers can create a supportive environment for language learning. By incorporating rewards and recognition, libraries can further motivate youth to embrace their cultural identity and contribute to its preservation (Wurm, 1997).

5. Educational Programmes

Libraries engage in various educational initiatives to promote Kashmiri literature and culture among students and the public.

Promoting Kashmiri Literature in Education

Libraries preserve regional knowledge as part of the broader Indian Knowledge System. By supporting research, preserving traditional manuscripts, and promoting indigenous knowledge, libraries contribute to maintaining cultural heritage (Singh & Sharma, 2024). Through workshops, seminars, and reading sessions, libraries introduce young readers to Kashmiri literary traditions. Programmes organised by the Public Library provide educational platforms that familiarise the public with the literary heritage of Kashmir (Gul, 2022).

6. Cultural Integration

Libraries are no longer mere storage spaces for books but dynamic institutions that safeguard cultural expressions. By archiving forms of literature like drama, novel, folklore, and poetry, as well as recordings of traditional dances and ceremonies, libraries preserve the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. Moreover, their initiatives to record live performances at national and local levels contribute to a rich cultural archive. Such activities ensure that even if cultural practices evolve or

fade, their essence remains intact for researchers, educators, and future communities to access and appreciate (Chigwada & Ngulube, 2024). Libraries, serving diverse communities, can help foster intercultural understanding and appreciation, creating a comprehensive cultural environment and promoting awareness of regional literature and heritage. Libraries can promote cross-cultural understanding by including Kashmiri literature in exhibitions and programmes that reach beyond regional boundaries, bringing Kashmiri perspectives to the global stage. Libraries foster intercultural dialogue through curated exhibitions that include Kashmiri literature, enabling greater cross-cultural appreciation. For instance, the Kashmir Cultural Centre Library holds exhibitions to promote intercultural dialogue and enhance understanding of Kashmiri culture (Chowdhury, 2019).

7. Research Support

Libraries support academic research in Kashmiri literature by offering access to rare texts, archives, and scholarly publications, essential for the study and preservation of the language. For instance, the Jammu and Kashmir State Library and Allama Iqbal Library of University of Kashmir among others, provide access to rare literary archives, allowing researchers to conduct in-depth studies on Kashmiri literature and culture (Siddiqi, 2021).

Conclusion

The preservation and revitalisation of endangered languages are essential for maintaining cultural identity, history, and diversity. Language embodies the collective memory, values, and worldview of its speakers, but many languages face endangerment and possible extinction due to socio-political pressures and declining usage. Efforts to preserve these languages require a multifaceted approach, including documentation, education, and community engagement, supported by modern tools like digital libraries and e-content. These technologies play a transformative role, creating accessible repositories. Libraries, as custodians of heritage, are instrumental in preserving manuscripts, historical texts, and cultural traditions, acting as bridges between generations and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

In the context of Kashmiri, libraries in the region such as Allama Iqbal Library, University of Kashmir have taken proactive steps to safeguard the rich literary and cultural legacy of the Kashmiri language.

Libraries are significant for the preservation, translation, transliteration, promotion, and accessibility of Kashmiri language and literature. They protect historical texts, support local authors, and engage communities through educational programmes, literary festivals, and intercultural exhibitions. As knowledge hubs and cultural anchors, libraries play a crucial role in preserving the rich literary heritage of Kashmir. Their work underscores the importance of maintaining and promoting linguistic diversity as a core component of cultural identity and heritage. Revitalising endangered languages like Kashmiri requires a collective effort that values linguistic diversity, with governments, educators, and communities working together to sustain and celebrate this irreplaceable aspect of human heritage.

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